

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN PETER DALLMAN, COMMODORE OF USS BOXER VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM THE COAST OF EL SALVADOR SUBJECT: CONTINUING PROMISE 2008 MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 11:30 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2008

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LT. CATRERRA (SP): Good morning, gentlemen. This is Lieutenant J.G. Catrerra (sp) calling from USS Boxer, part of Continuing Promise 2008. And I have Commodore Dallman with me at this moment.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you very much. I'm Jack Holt with DOD, the Blogger's Roudtable. And Commodore Dallman, thank you very much for joining us. Do you have an opening statement for us, sir?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Well, hi, good morning, happy to be here. It's a little hard to hear, so if I ask you to repeat, my apologies. We're also doing flight ops on the flight deck right above me so we've got some challenges on our end over here. MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Do you want to -- can you an you give us a quick rundown on the mission of the Boxer and Continuing Promise 2008?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Sure, sure, absolutely. Boxer is a large-deck, amphibious assault ship home ported in San Diego, California. We left about three weeks ago, traveled down to Guatemala. We were there for 11 days. We're off the coast of Acajutla, El Salvador right now on day four of our 12 mission days here in El Salvador.

In Boxer, we have about 40 medical professionals normally. And we've augmented with that about another 100-plus, probably 125 healthcare professionals across a broad spectrum of optometry, ophthalmology, dental care, internal medicine, primary care -- (inaudible). And those folks are conducting clinics ashore, basically one main medical clinic a day. And we also have with us a unique Naval construction engineering capability called the Seabees. And those guys -- we have 60 of those guys, and they're conducting -- or doing small-grade construction projects ashore improving schools, re-roofing, electrical plumbing, windows and screens, things like that, to schools and churches here in El Salvador and already done in Guatemala.

So that's basically what we're here to do. This mission is called Continuing Promise, and it reflects our -- the United States' commitment to our partners in Latin America. And we're coming down here and trying to do good. We're working side by side with the countries of El Salvador and Guatemala with their medical professionals and their engineers as well.

And we also have some other elements of the medical portion of this. I just want to mention quickly our training and education classes we're holding. We're conducting some biomedical equipment repair. We have a veterinarian team with us who are servicing the animals in the area. And we're also doing some minor surgeries onboard Boxer here. We're bringing patients out to the ship and screening them. And they -- be it a minor surgery such as cataracts, an appendectomy today and several hernias already.

So that's the basic mission that we have.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Chuck, you were first online, so why don't you get us started there?

Q Yes. Good morning, sir. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

I've been following Boxer through the photos that are coming up on the Navy site; you're doing a lot of good work there. I had a question about transportation. It appears that most of your teams are traveling by land to their sites. Are you using any rotary-wing capacity for anything?

CAPT. DALLMAN: I'm sorry. I just can't hear too well. I guess you were asking a question about transportation, and I heard a question -- the phrase rotary-wing craft in there. I didn't really get your question.

Q Yeah, rotary wing versus land transportation -- are you using rotary wing for anything?

CAPT. DALLMAN: We're using our -- we have eight helicopters onboard, and we're using the helicopters to transport both our personnel to the shore and back again, as well as we're using the helicopters to transport the patients because it's -- we believe it's a little quicker and a little safer than using the landing craft out of the back end of the ship there -- the surface on the water.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Grim.

Q Good day. This is Grim of blackfive.net. We had quite a few El Salvadorians in Iraq at FOB Delta when I was over there. And they remember the United States standing by them in a difficult period. So it's good that you're doing things for our allies. I wanted to ask you, to what degree are you doing combined operations with local forces to build their capacity to do this sort of thing themselves?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Grim, I'm not really sure. I just can't hear real well. To what degree are we doing what kind of operations?

Q Operations with the El Salvadorian military to build their capacity.

CAPT. DALLMAN: We're working side by side with the El Salvadorians. They have lots of docks and dentists right there in our clinics. And we're working side by side with the engineers at the site. And we're working very closely with their army to effect ground transportation and, you know, standard

force-protection measures. So we're working very closely with the El Salvadorians.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Any other follow-up questions?

Q Yeah. I'd like to ask about -- were all of the extra crew, the veterinarians, the extra medical people -- were they onboard from when you sailed, or have they augmented you upon arrival in Central America? COMM. DALLHMAN: Yeah, I think I understand what you're asking. Let me answer the question this way. Boxer is a ship of about 1,200 people, and they normally have a medical staff of about 25. I'm actually the commodore for Boxer. The captain of Boxer actually works for me in addition to a couple of the other COs. And I have working for me a fleet surgical team of another 17 folks. So normally, we'll have 42 medical people, including the dentists, work here on Boxer. And that's in support of typically Marine operations. We don't have any Marines onboard doing Marine stuff right now other than a couple of guys flying helicopters.

What we've done is we've augmented that staff of, say, 42 with about 90 mostly Navy people pulled from literally across the world, I think about 25 different commands. And those people all sailed with us from San Diego. So they are all in addition to our standard group of 42.

And in addition to those folks, we have a team from the public health service. We also have a team from Project HOPE. And they are conducting, you know -- they're fitting into this medical team as well. So about 10 or so from both of those groups. And they've been a welcome addition.

Q Thank you.

CAPT. DALLMAN: And all those people sailed with us from San Diego about three-and-a-half weeks ago now.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And what's your estimated time of return?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Well, we're heading on to Peru from here, and we're going to conduct a similar mission down there a few less days. And then we'll back in San Diego toward the end of June. It's two months deployment total.

MR. HOLT: Okay. So the countries you'll have visited would be Guatemala, El Salvador and Peru?

CAPT. DALLMAN: That's correct. And this is the Pacific phase of mission Continuing Promise. It's two parts. The other part is an Atlantic phase which is going to occur later on this summer. It's essentially a four-month deployment in the Caribbean and on the eastern coast of South America to conduct the exact same mission, essentially pretty much the exact same type of people. It will be a large -deck, amphibious ship Kearsarge amphibious squadron. A commodore like myself will be in command of that. And they'll have pretty much the same mix of medical, dental, health professionals as well as some Seabees they'll take long with them to do the same kind of thing. And I don't have the countries off the top of my head, but it will be a similar mission on the East Coast. So that's the Atlantic phase of Continuing Promise and servicing many -- you know, working with many other countries in Latin America.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. And thank you for joining us. Could you just give us a sense of how you've been received in the countries so far?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Sure, sure, absolutely. We've been very warmly received by both Guatemala and El Salvador. I think there certainly is a need here. And we also have learned much from the folks that we've been working with and treating. I would say there's been an overwhelming, sincere appreciation for our efforts and -- you know, our commitment to their countries and to their people. And that's been very gratifying and it's been constant and very visible that they've been very thankful for what we're trying to do here. We have been seeing on average 6 (hundred) or 700 patients a day total between dental, optometry and primary care. We saw over -- you know, close to five-and-a-half thousand primary care patients in Guatemala. We did -- we're up to 67 total surgeries for the deployment, handed out close to 1,000 glasses in Guatemala; over 2,000 optometry patients seen; close to 1,500 animals have been treated.

So the work has been good. The Seabees have been busy. We worked on -- they worked on three schools, two culverts -- drainage ditches -- and then they re-route the church in Guatemala. And here in El Salvador, they're working on two schools, essentially, to basically get the school back up to where it can function in terms of running water, flushing toilets, working kitchen, a roof that's not going to leak and screens on the windows; lights and electricity standardized throughout the whole compound, things like that.

So all in all, the work's been very good, and we've been very warmly received in both countries. It really has been very gratifying to see how grateful and thankful these folks are, and obviously, it's very heartwarming for all the providers to -- and Seabees to see all that. So all in all, it's been a great experience for all of us.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much and --

Q Jack?

MR. HOLT: We appreciate -- yes, go ahead.

Q I got one more.

Commodore, is this a unique mission for Boxer or have they done it -- this kind of thing before and will they continue to do this sort of mission?

CAPT. DALLMAN: Well, let me answer that in a couple of different ways. Boxer's -- this is not -- Boxer has been involved in humanitarian work before. They were -- they volunteered to support Habitat for Humanity's Carter Project in October/November of 2006, where they were building single-family homes in Lonavala, India. They also volunteered for community service projects in Singapore and Australia on our way back from the last deployment. So Boxer has some history of this kind of thing. Obviously, this is a dedicated two-month mission where this is the mission.

I would say, to answer your question, also as opposed to just Boxer, we have many other ships in the United States Navy as well as our hospital ships that have been focused on this type of mission, going back to the tsunami relief effort in 2004 off Aceh. That's where we first started this. And then Mercy went out to the Western Pacific two summers ago. They just left again a couple

of weeks ago -- probably went out to the Western Pacific last summer. Obviously Comfort came down here to Latin America last summer as well. Now, Boxer and Mercy's underway again, and then like I said, Kearsarge is going to be doing the same type of thing for four months later on in the summer.

So it reflects the United States Navy's -- or I should say, our maritime strategy -- the new maritime strategy which has been signed by not only the chief of the Navy -- the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Roughead, but also the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Commandant of the Coast Guard. All three of those maritime commanders have espoused the strategy which focuses on building lasting relationships and cooperative relationships with partner nations through this type of effort -- not just humanitarian stuff, but all types of engagements. And that's -- this mission directly reflects that desire and that goal, which is clearly stated in the maritime strategy.

So I think -- you know, Boxer's -- this mission is one element in that grand strategy. And I think we're going to continue to see these types of missions because it certainly has the CNO's interest and support, I can tell you that.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Captain Peter Dallman, the commodore of the USS Boxer on the Continuing Promise 2008 mission on the Pacific side of South America.

Thank you very much for being with us, sir --

CAPT. DALLMAN: Sure. Sure, my pleasure.

MR. HOLT: -- and perhaps we can speak again, sir.

CAPT. DALLMAN: Okay. Any time.

END.